

Mindfulness of Attitude

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And to say a few words about this practice that we do, the attitude with which we practice is part of the practice. To notice if we have an attitude as we practice. And if the attitude is not a helpful one, finding a better attitude to do the practice in. And if we can't do a better attitude, then the attitude that we have becomes the object of mindfulness. Just get to know it. It's not a problem, but we want to see it and include it as part of the practice.

So seeing, you know, is the attitude one of anxiety? Is the attitude one of striving? Is the attitude one of looking at the other side of where you're trying to get to? Is the attitude one of hesitation? Is it one of feeling inadequate, feeling like you don't deserve anything, not capable? There's all these attitudes. And they're an attitude because they're kind of like the atmosphere, or how we're oriented to doing the practice.

And there's always some attitude. And it could be a peaceful attitude. It could be an accepting attitude. It could be curious. There could be a lot of trust in the practice, an attitude of trust or attitude of faith. So, asking yourself, what is the attitude here? And does this attitude serve me? Does this attitude support what I'm doing?

And one way to do this, studying the attitude, is, there's a number of ways to do it. One is to, there's something we do called mental noting, where we use a very simple thought to recognize what's happening in the moment. So if I'm breathing in, a simple thought might be in. Breathing out might be out. And it's just building on the natural ability we have to recognize what's happening as it's happening. Some of us might recognize it nonverbally.

Sometimes it might be very quiet little thoughts that are recognizing what's happening in the moment. I have an itch, and you might say, well, there's an itch. Or it's silent. You know you're recognizing it. But the mental note is giving voice to that recognition in a very, very simple way. So itch, for example, in, out, hearing, thinking, sad, happy.

And one of the advantages of doing that is it keeps you present. It's kind of like an anchor. It's kind of like saying, OK, here I am. I'm present for this now. So it protects the mind from just wandering off into thought a lot, to be here with this, here with this, here with this.

The other thing it does, can do, is the voice with which you do the mental noting can be an indication of your attitude. You know, for example, I might have pain in my knee, and I might, you know, the thing to do is then to use a very simple note, pain. But if I listen to my voice, how I say it, it might sound more like pain. There's a lot of attitude in that label. I have a whole attitude, resistance, aversion to the pain, and I'm operating with that aversion.

If I'm having just a really sweet breath, it's just such a sweet, quiet, peaceful breath. It's just like so nice. And so now when I say in, breathing in, I go in. So that's an attitude too. Now it's an attitude maybe of indulging or just like luxuriating in it.

Both these attitudes, the aversive attitude or luxuriating attitude, are not mindfulness. It actually clouds over or agitates the mindfulness. It gets in the way of the very simple, ordinary way in which we just be present for it. So if it's really pleasant in-breath, really sweet, you might say, sweet, just sweet, pleasant. That's it. No extra attitude. No extra attitude in the awareness of it. Just aware. Just present for this.

If there's aversion, you might say pain. You might say pain with aversion, like I did. But then you would say to yourself, pain, it's aversion. Oh, aversion's happening. And so you wouldn't have aversion to the aversion. The attitude would be matter-of-fact, simple, letting it be as it is, and just seeing it clearly for how it is.

So that's one of the advantages of this mental noting. Sometimes you get the early warning sign that some attitude about what's happening is operating that you wouldn't see otherwise. And this has been invaluable for me in my practice, is to just notice the tone of voice in which I'm using the mental noting.

The other thing about the attitude is what impact, what effect does it have on the way that you're being mindful? What's the impact it has in the quality of the awareness that you have? Is the awareness contracted? Is it tight? Is there pressure behind it? Is there hesitation? Is there reluctance? Is there anxiety that's built into the awareness itself?

And then, so the attitude sometimes can be integrated, not just in your general attitude at the moment, but it's actually the attitude of how we're being aware, and in some deeper way. And the reference point for this is we would like to have the awareness be calm. So that's the reference point, meaning you don't have to be that way. But the idea of a calm awareness, calm knowing, calm recognition, calm observation, calm feeling of the experience, that

reference point helps you to see, well actually I'm not very calm. I'm in a hurry.

I mean, why do we meditate for 45 minutes? I can get this done in 10. And then I have important things to do. I have a big to-do list. And so why do 45 when I could just really nail it in 10 minutes? So there's a lot of attitude there. And so you feel the pressure, the tightness, the striving. It's not calm. Not calm awareness.

So is it anxious? Is it pulled back? Is the awareness hesitant because it's kind of scary to show up for what's here? So that's not a calm awareness either. So start seeing what is the nature of the awareness. And can it be calm? Very simple. Ideally, amazingly ordinary.

Not trying to be special. Not pushing for special states. But just ordinary. Calm awareness. Calm awareness. Just calmly aware of this. If you're agitated, calmly aware of agitation.

If you have agitated emotions, calmly know, oh, this is a day of agitated emotions. And what this does is that many times we identify so strongly with our inner experiences, with our attitudes, our emotions, that it's like, well, if I have agitated feelings in my body, I am agitated. And that's the end of the story. But with a calm awareness, it helps you to see, oh, it's just agitation. I don't have to define myself by it. I don't have to be it.

If anything, you try to be the calm awareness. At some point, that's even too much. But just to calmly know. Calmly know when you're calm. Calmly know when you're agitated. Calmly know when you're striving, that you're striving. Calmly know when you're anxious, that you're anxious.

Calmly know when you have aversion, that there's aversion. Calmly know when there's curiosity. Calmly know that when it's just kind of easygoing and easy and accepting awareness. Know that. And so it's the calm awareness that can have a really powerful effect on us when it's the continuity of how we're practicing.

And part of the reason why it has such power, this ordinary, simple way of just calmly being aware, is that everything you're going to know will come through that door. Everything that you touch, everything that you experience, everything that you witness, everything that you do, in a sense, then will go past this little, maybe, I don't know if it's the best analogy, but a little hourglass, the neck of the hourglass, which is your calm awareness. So that calm awareness then can cast its influence, its perspective, its wisdom on everything, everywhere you go, because it's all going to be touched by calm awareness. It's a remarkable thing.

So mindfulness of attitude is an important part of this practice. And so to notice what is your attitude and know it calmly and see what happens next. Don't make it a problem. So those are my thoughts.

And now we get to practice looking at our attitude when we do an ordinary thing, cleaning. There can be a lot of attitude that goes into that.